WRATH OF THE SERFS

— A Group of Life-Size Clay Sculptures

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Foreword

LOCATED on a plateau in southwest China, Tibet is a beautiful place rich in natural resources. It is the home of 1.6 million industrious and brave people of the Tibetan and other nationalities.

Old Tibet was a theocracy with feudal serf system, the lamasery and nobility exercising a dictatorship combining political and religious rule. Three kinds of estate-holders — the reactionary local government, the lamaseries and the nobility — at the head of which was the Dalai Lama, owned all fields, hills, forests and almost all livestock. The serfs and slaves, on the other hand, who made up 95 per cent of the population, owned no means of production nor had they any rights or freedom whatsoever. Numerous *ula* services (a type of unpaid conscript labour exacted from the slaves by the three estate-holders), crushing land taxes, levies and usury were like pythons strangling the serfs and slaves. The three estate-holders savagely slaughtered and tortured the serfs at will, committing unspeakable crimes against them. The old local government of Tibet, the *kasha,* colluded with foreign imperialists to brutally suppress the revolts of the serfs in order to prolong the criminal estate-holder rule.

"Where there is oppression there is resistance." The million serfs never bowed before the serf-owner class despite its knives, rifles and torments. History records the rebellion in 1918 of serfs in Thridug County of northern Tibet. Their leader was a woman whose name was Hor Lhamo. The uprising serfs advanced the slogans "Down with the officials! Abolish all *ula* services!" and assailed the county government, killing its chief. In less than half a century before Tibet's liberation the serfs rose in large-scale revolt more than a hundred times. Wave upon wave they advanced in unyielding struggle for their emancipation, hitting hard at the reactionary rule of the serf-owners.

Long years of extremely reactionary dictatorship under the serf-owner class had kept Tibet poverty-stricken and backward, stagnant and in utter decadence.

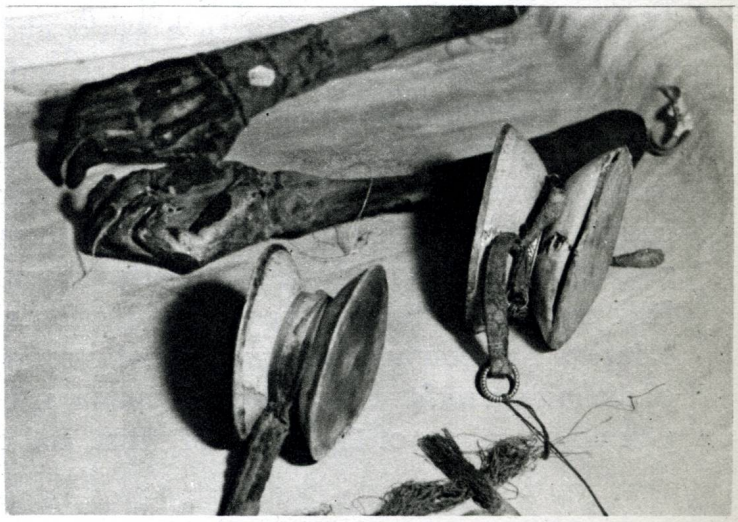
Horns for religious ceremony fashioned from serfs' and young girls' arm and thigh bones. They are relics of atrocities by old Tibet's reactionary rulers headed by the Dalai Lama.

Bowls from the household of the Dalai Lama. They are made from the skulls of murdered serfs.

Tibet's new page in history was turned with its peaceful liberation in 1951. But, in 1959, the Tibet traitor clique headed by the Dalai Lama brazenly staged an armed counter-revolutionary rebellion, which, however, the Chinese People's Liberation Army put down at the request of and in co-ordination with Tibet's million serfs. The sweeping democratic reform movement that followed put an end to the thoroughly reactionary, dark and savage feudal serf society. The reactionary estate-holders' rule was abolished and the million serfs stood up. In 1965 the Tibet Autonomous Region was formally established. With the wise leadership of Chairman Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Communist Party, the people of the Tibetan and other nationalities took a social leap of several centuries in little more than a decade and began speeding along the bright socialist road.

Two human skins stripped from live serfs. Such practices were indulged in at will by the serf-owners.

Serfs' hands and forearms which were chopped off by the lamas during religious ceremonies in a lamasery of old Tibet. The prayer drums were also made of serf victims' skulls and skins.



With the aim of sharply exposing the evils of the old Tibet and warmly acclaiming the serfs' heroic and brave struggles, sculptors from the College of Fine Arts of the Central May Seventh Academy of Arts in Peking and a teacher from the Lu Hsun Art College of Shenyang co-operated with art workers of Tibet in producing the clay sculptures, *Wrath of the Serfs*. The work took eighteen months. The sculptures are arranged in four parts: the feudal manor, the lamasery, the *kasha* or the former local government, and the serfs' struggle for liberation. There are 106 life-size figures of men and women, with four reliefs and many murals as background. The images are not only artistic but amazingly lifelike, the art workers using sculpture, relief and mural painting to produce figures and settings with strong artistic impact.

Preparation for the work included more than 5,000 kilometres of travel inside Tibet for the purpose of study and investigation. The artists listened to the angry condemnation of past sufferings by a hundred liberated serfs, asked for suggestions from former poor and lower-middle peasants and herdsmen and improved their works on this basis. The method helped to deepen the art workers' understanding of the significance of creating such works and strengthened their determination to be faithful spokesmen for the liberated serfs of Tibet. While working, they studied Chairman Mao's article "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" and made good use of the experience gained in creating the revolutionary model operas. They put forth great effort to insinuate the typical, impelling art images with the profound themes and their own strong class feeling by combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. The sculptures thus powerfully reveal the multifarious crimes of the feudal serf system, then enthusiastically eulogize the courageous struggle and strongly voiced eagerness for liberation of the million serfs. The group of sculptures brings greater understanding of the past untold misery of the people of Tibet, and of their struggle against it.

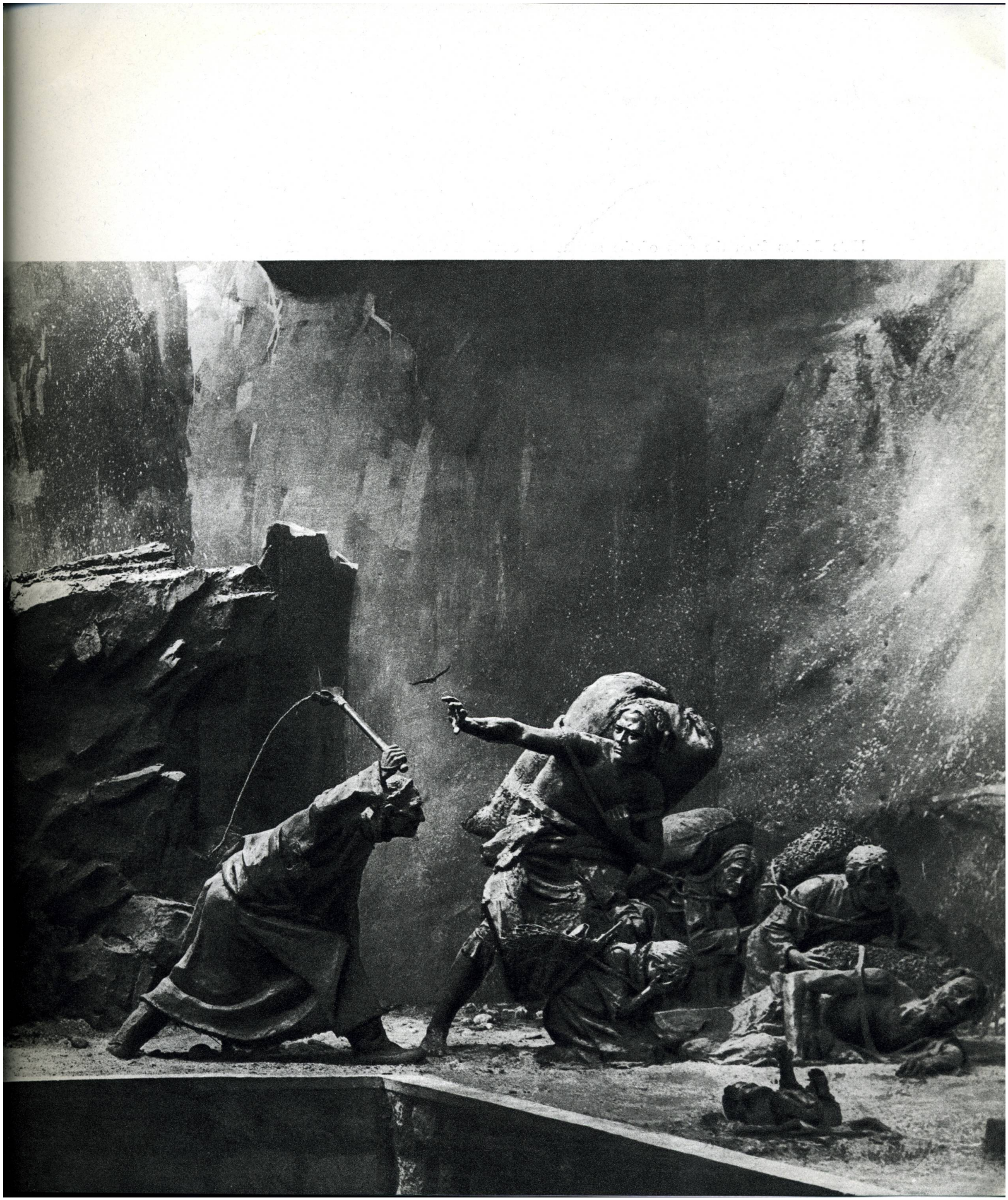
Part I

The Feudal Manor — Hell on Earth

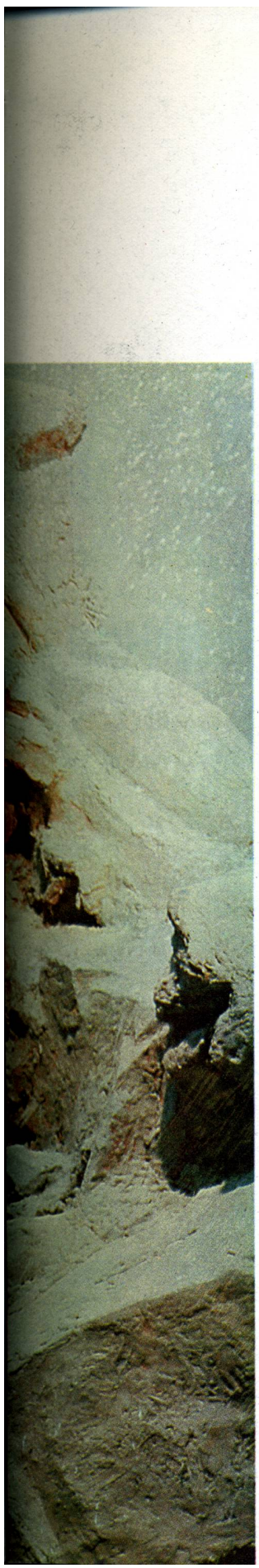
UNDER the feudal serf system the masses of the serfs were mercilessly exploited and oppressed by the serf-owning class. The feudal lords exacted unpaid, hard labour from the serfs, who were bought and sold, used as mortgages or bartered at their owners' will. The life of the serfs was worse than that of draught animals as they struggled to live on from generation to generation.

The Plight of *Ula* Conscripted Labour

IN bitter wind and snow conscripted serfs trudge up a cliff on *ula* service. One carries his hated master up a steep mountain path; others stagger under heavy loads of butter, *chingko* barley and rice which they are forced to transport for their master.



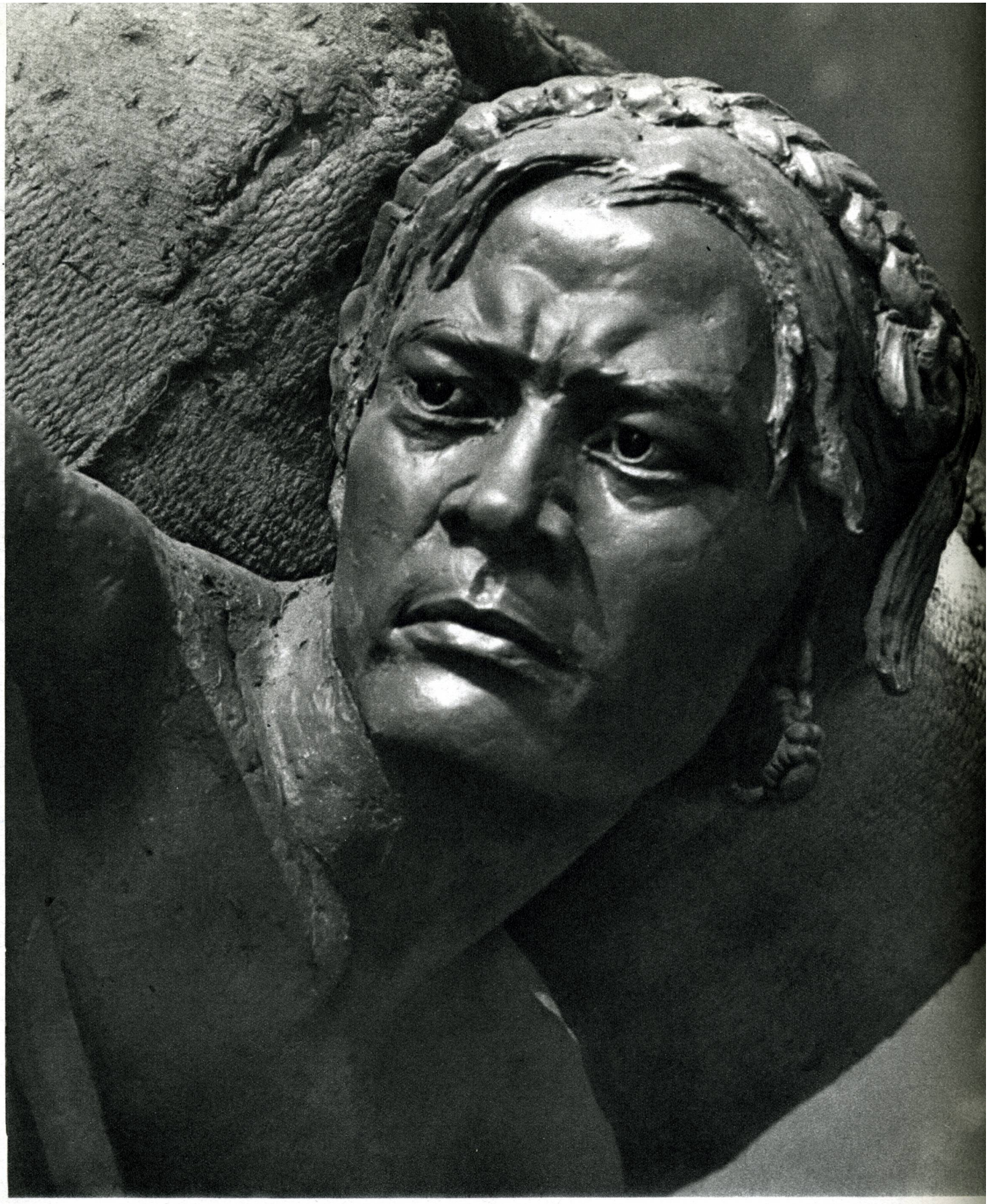
Hate flashes from the eyes of the serf as he carries his master up the cliff.



A young woman serf, exhausted and starved, clutches a rock to keep from falling under her heavy load of *chingko.*

An old woman, bent under her crushing load of grain, tries to catch a little snow to moisten her mouth. She can only swallow her tears.

An old man has fallen under his load and bleeds from the mouth as his granddaughter kneels and cries. An overseer raises his whip to drive the old man on, but a fellow serf shields him.



Face of the protecting serf.

The old man who has fallen and a woman lightening his load.

Unpaid Hard Labour

EVERY inch of the feudal lords' land was drenched with the blood and sweat of the serfs; every grain the serfs reaped was steeped in their bitterness. A new mother is driven by an overseer's whip to pull a plough while her babe wails in the field. Huge crows swoop overhead, and one eyes the child from a bare branch, threatening it. Beside the young mother is a man serf in iron shackles. He tried once to escape and so also works under the overseer's whip.

The babe racked with hunger.

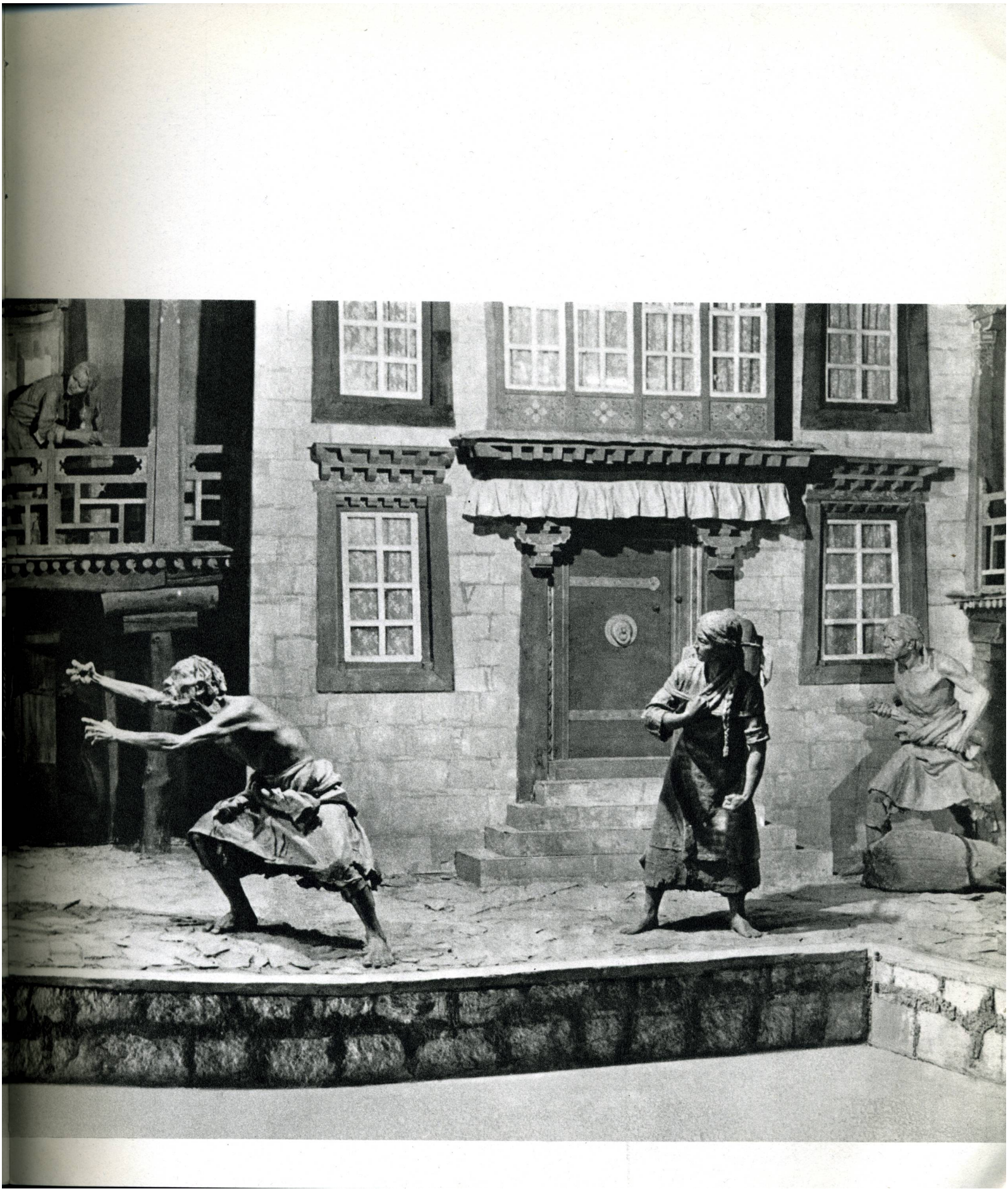
The distraught mother who is restrained from comforting her child.

The brutal overseer with his whip.

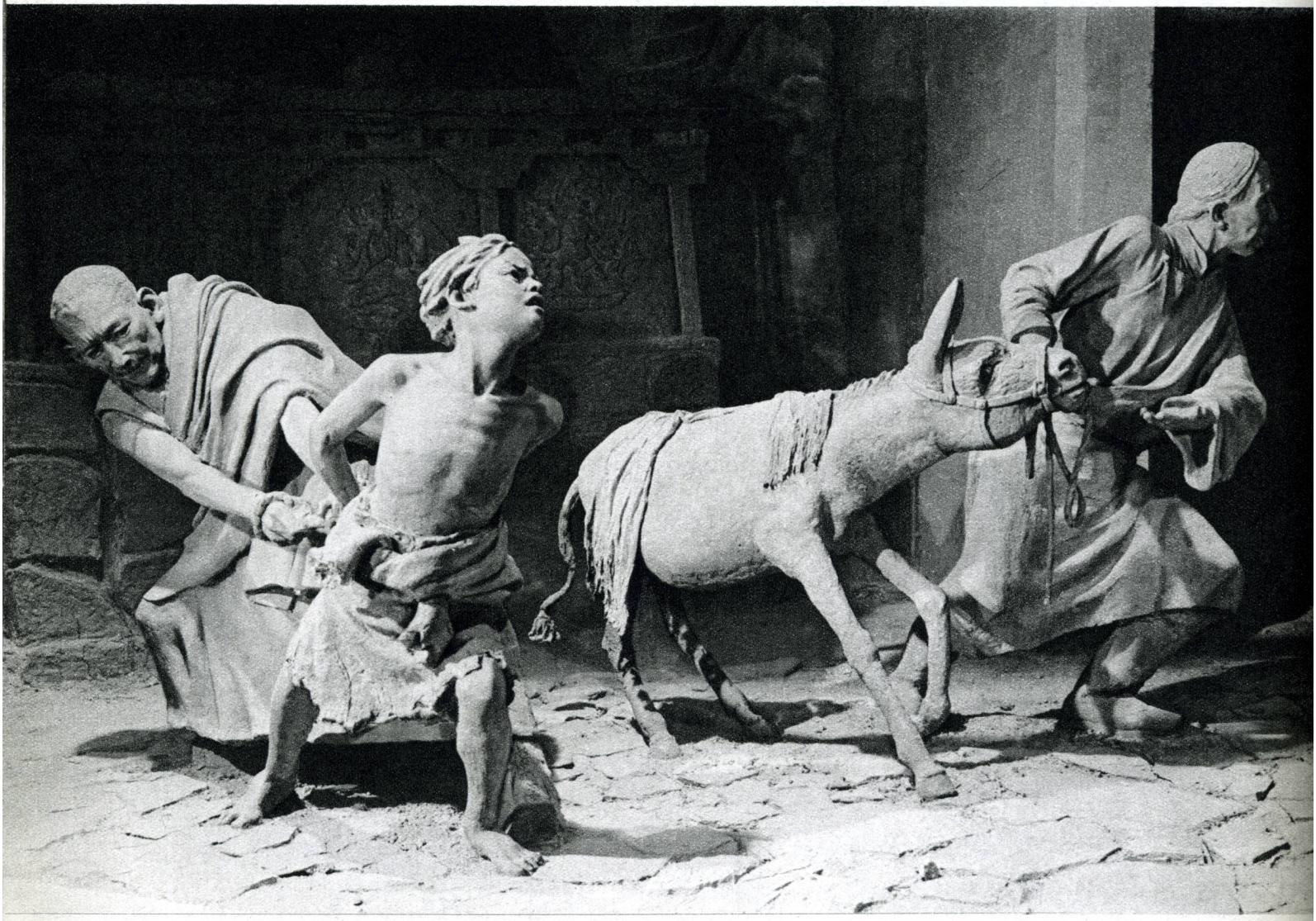
The man serf.

Bartering a Child Serf for a Donkey

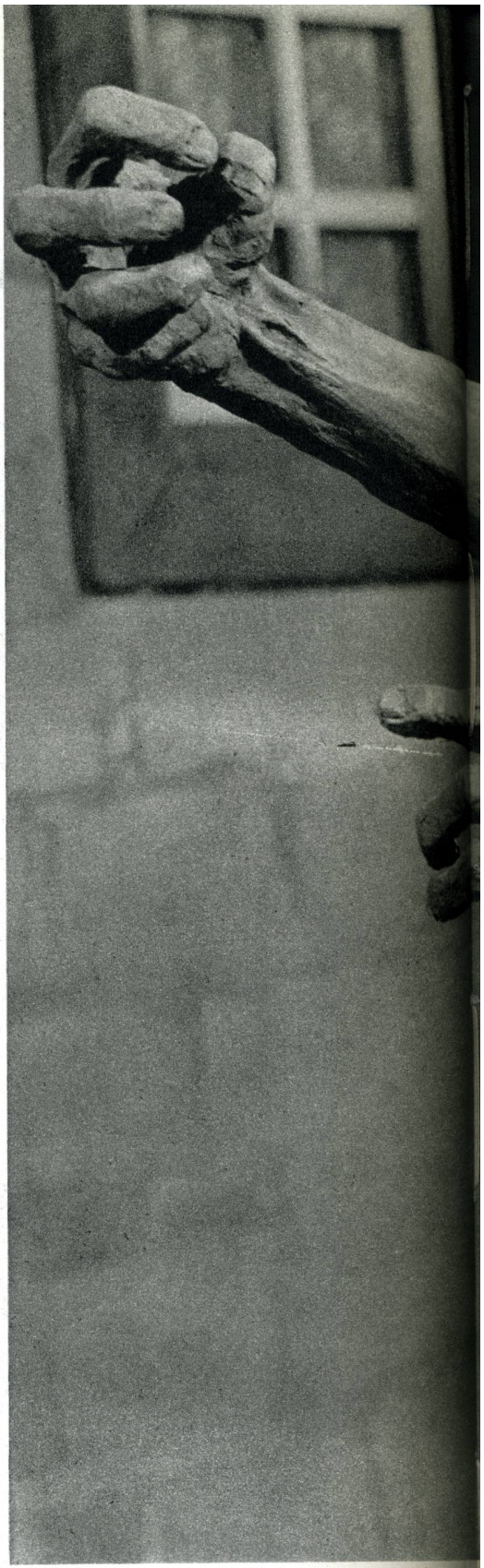
"LET go of me! Help me, Grandpa!" a child shouts from the manor. The feudal lord has seized the child to exchange for the donkey he wants to own. The grandfather, emaciated and with both eyes gouged out, rushes up in protest and reaches out for the child with his scrawny arms.

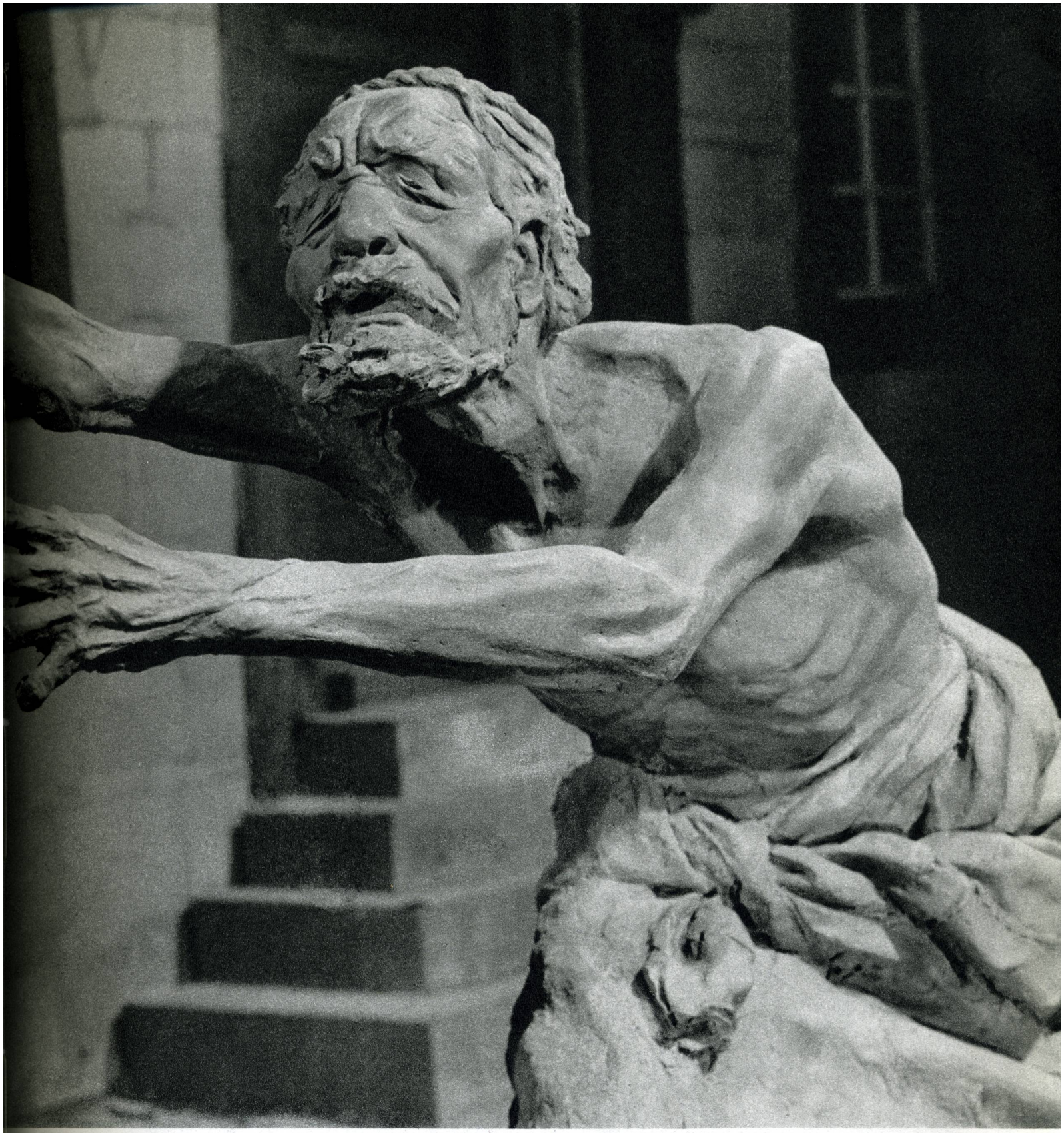


The steward pulls the child away.



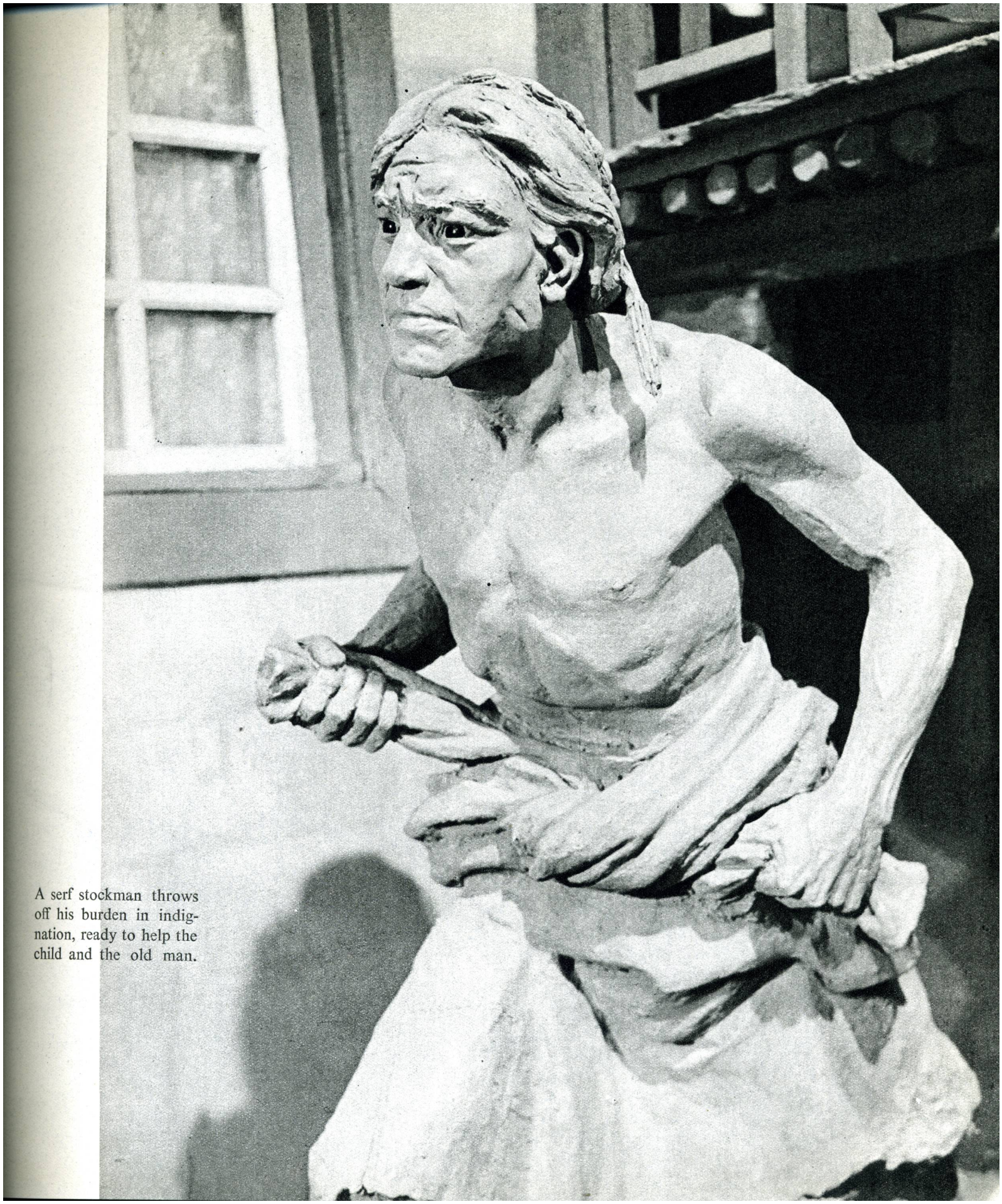
Ferocious lords of the manor.





"You evil-hearted wolves gouged out my eyes and fattened on my flesh and blood. Now you grab my grandson. I'll fight you fiends to the finish!"

A woman serf carrying water on her back watches with bitter hatred.



A serf stockman throws off his burden in indignation, ready to help the child and the old man.

Inhuman Existence

THREE generations huddle in a dismal tumbledown cowshed. The mother grinds peas day and night for the master. Her famished child reaches out with his bowl for food. But where can this exhausted mother get food for him? The wicked master's grinder breaks the serfs' bones and drains their blood but it can never destroy their vengeance born of blood and tears.

The hungry child.

The frail old granny has to card wool for the master all day long.

Part II

The Lamasery — Wicked Den for Devouring Serfs

THE lamasery was a spiritual pillar of the serf-owning class's reactionary rule. The serf-owners used religious authority to lull and persecute the labouring people. Lamaseries had their arbitrary "rules and regulations," instruments of torture and prisons. Many serfs were subjected to such unthinkable punishments as chopping off hands, feet or noses, gouging out eyes, pulling out tendons or skinning alive.

Extorting Debts from Serfs

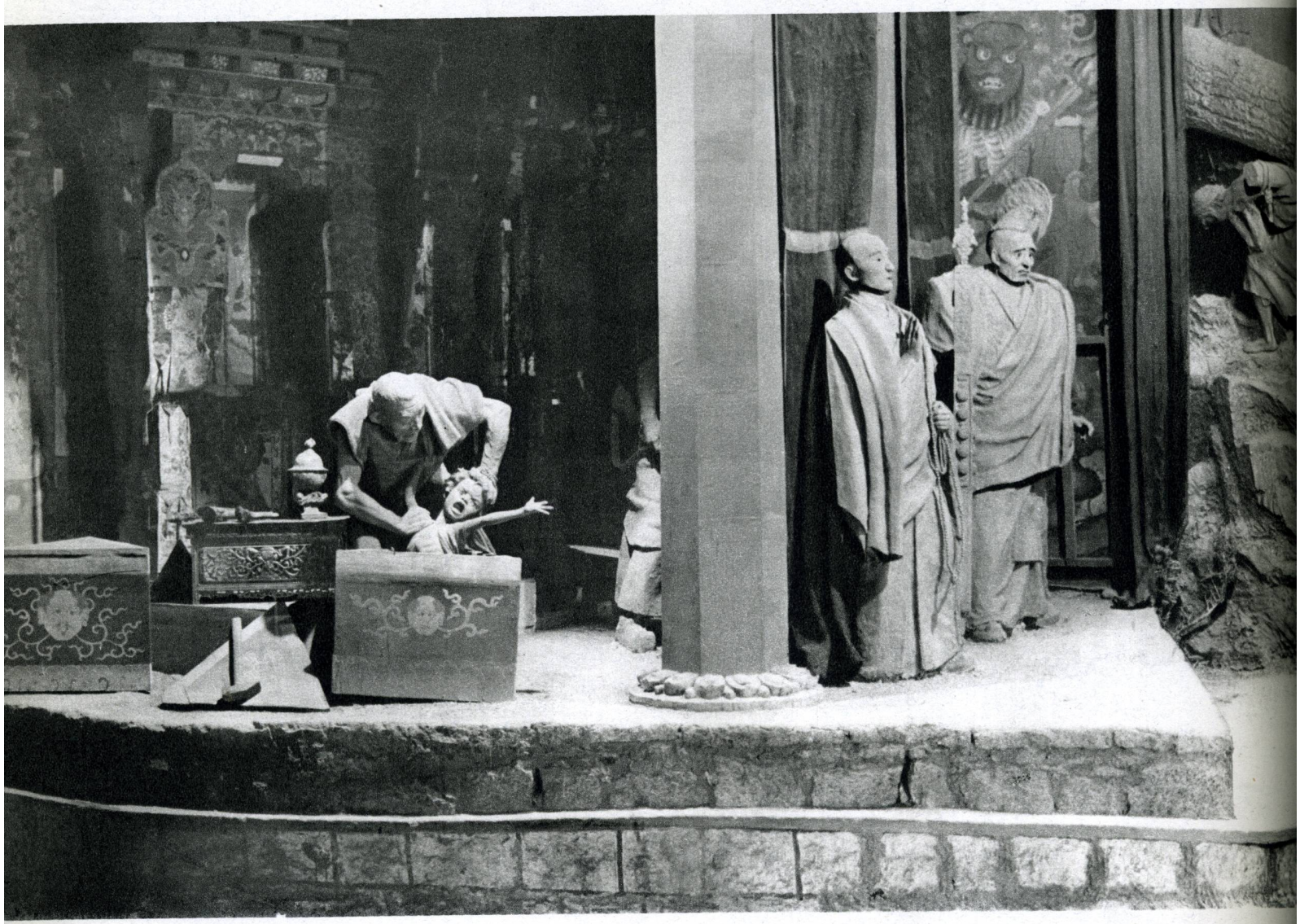
DARK clouds gather and wolves howl as a destitute herder is to be dragged to death by a horse for debt. From birth he has been saddled with a legacy from his grandfather of huge debts to the lamasery. Never having eaten a decent meal, every day of his life has been spent in herding cattle and sheep, carrying water and cutting firewood for the lamasery, only to suffer this agonizing end.

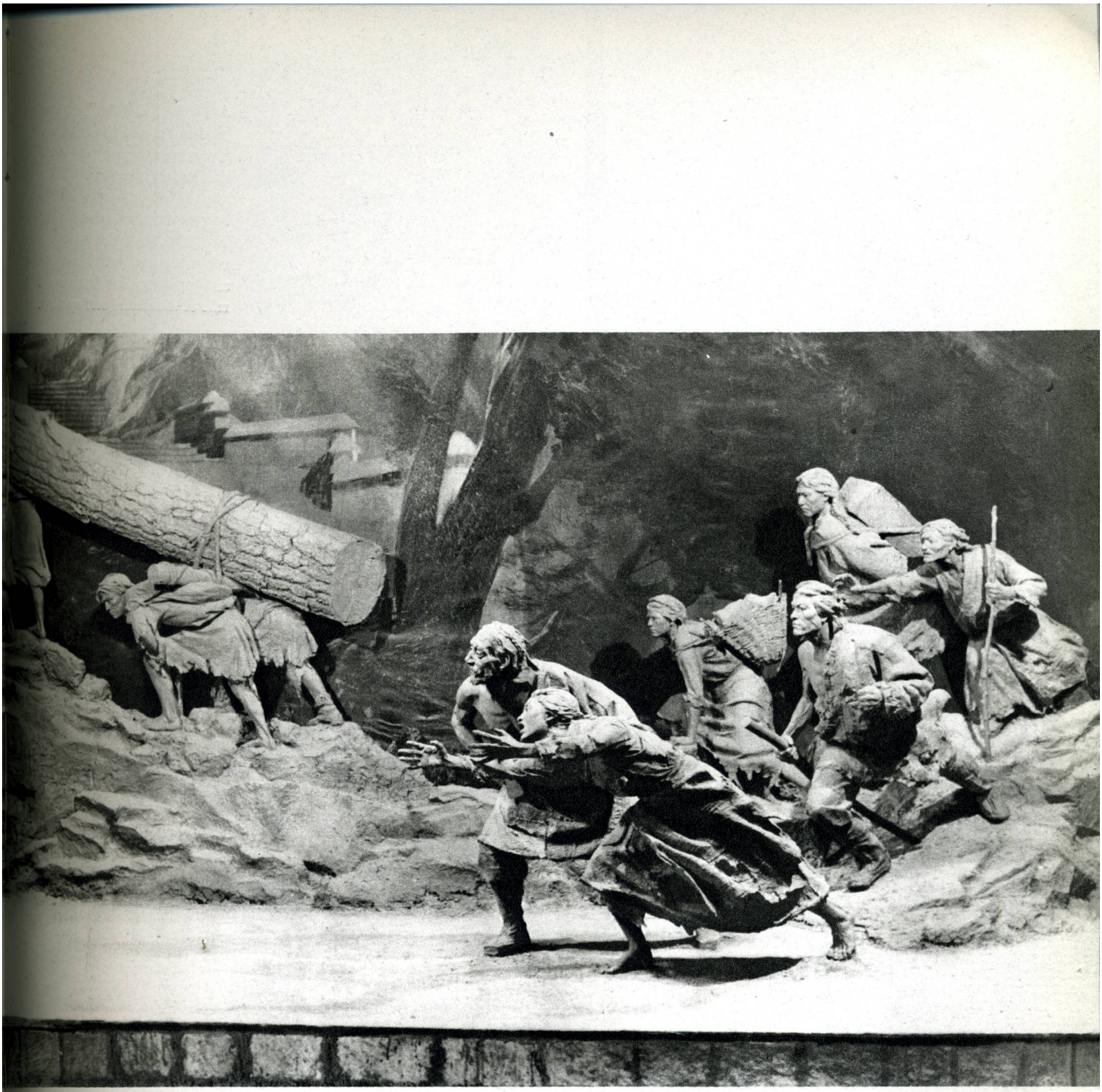
The evil steward's prayer beads do not efface the canine look in his eyes as, with his account book, he fattens on the flesh of the poor herders and serfs.

The unyielding herder. The torment may claim the skin from his body but it can never quench the flames of his towering hatred. "We'll have blood for blood from you wolves one day!" he vows.

The Man-Eating Religious Authority

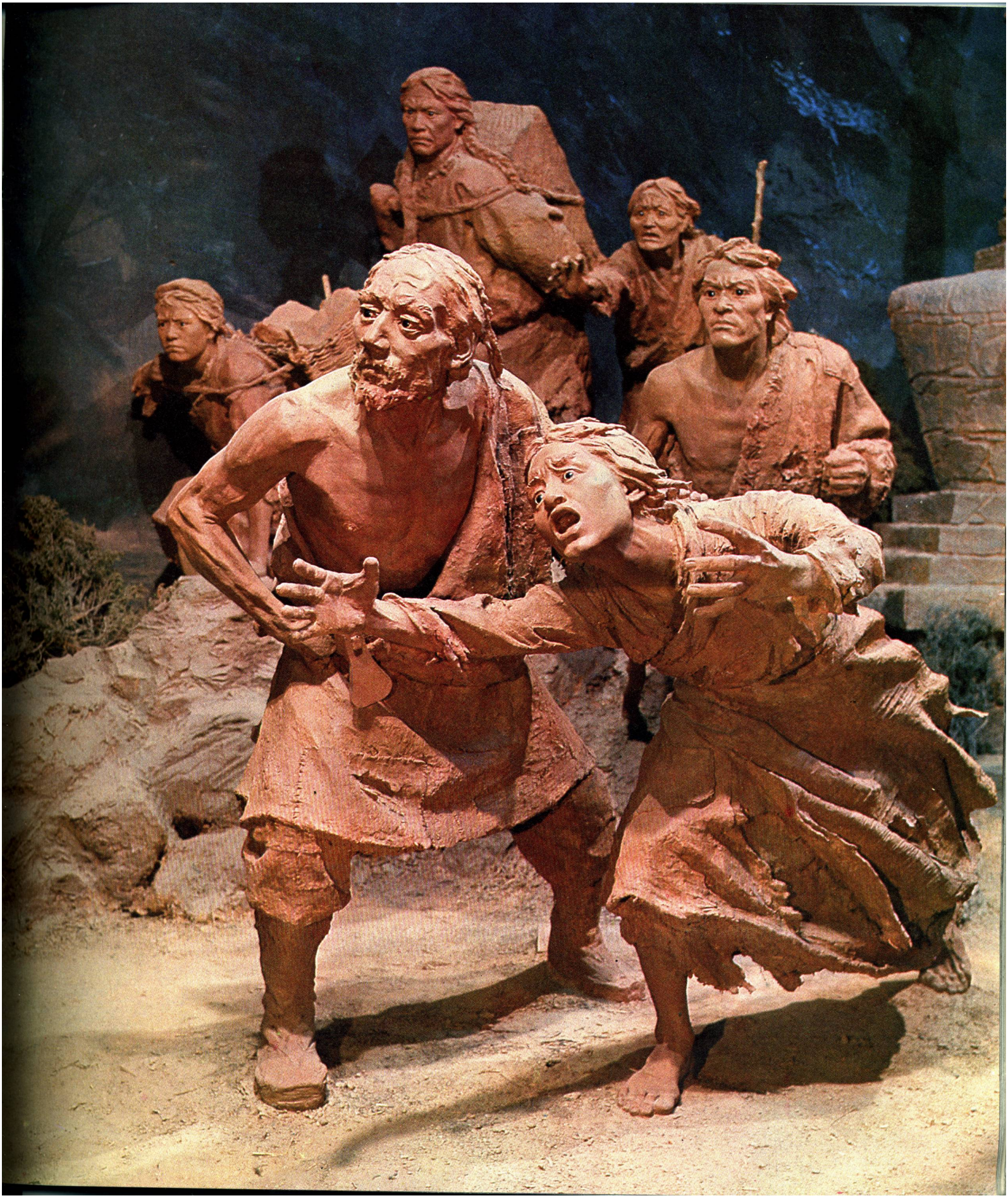
IN a dim inner hall a cassocked lama shoves a little boy into a box to be buried alive. In the name of building a temple, the boy is to be placed under a cornerstone of the hall as sacrificial offering. The mother hears her child's screams, rushes up and cries out. She is followed by an old carpenter and other serfs.



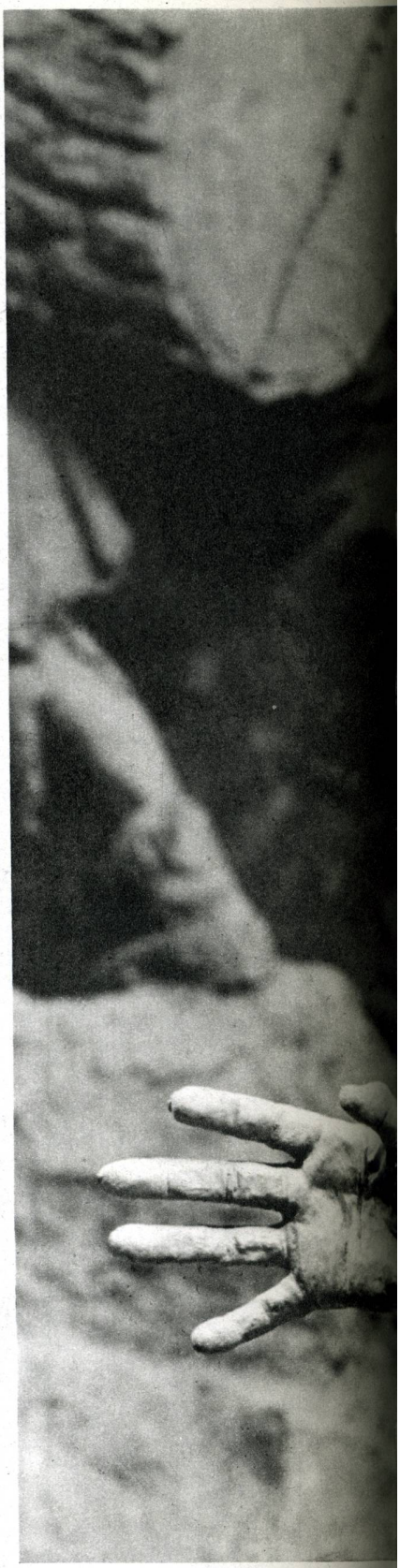


A "living Buddha" chants piously, reading his beads. He is guarded by a lama holding an iron staff. They are the executioners of the boy and many other serfs like him in their effort to suppress the serfs' revolts and prolong the barbarous rule of the feudal serf system.

The frantic, outraged mother and the old carpenter.



The mother stretches out her trembling hands for her child and cries: "Give me back my son!"



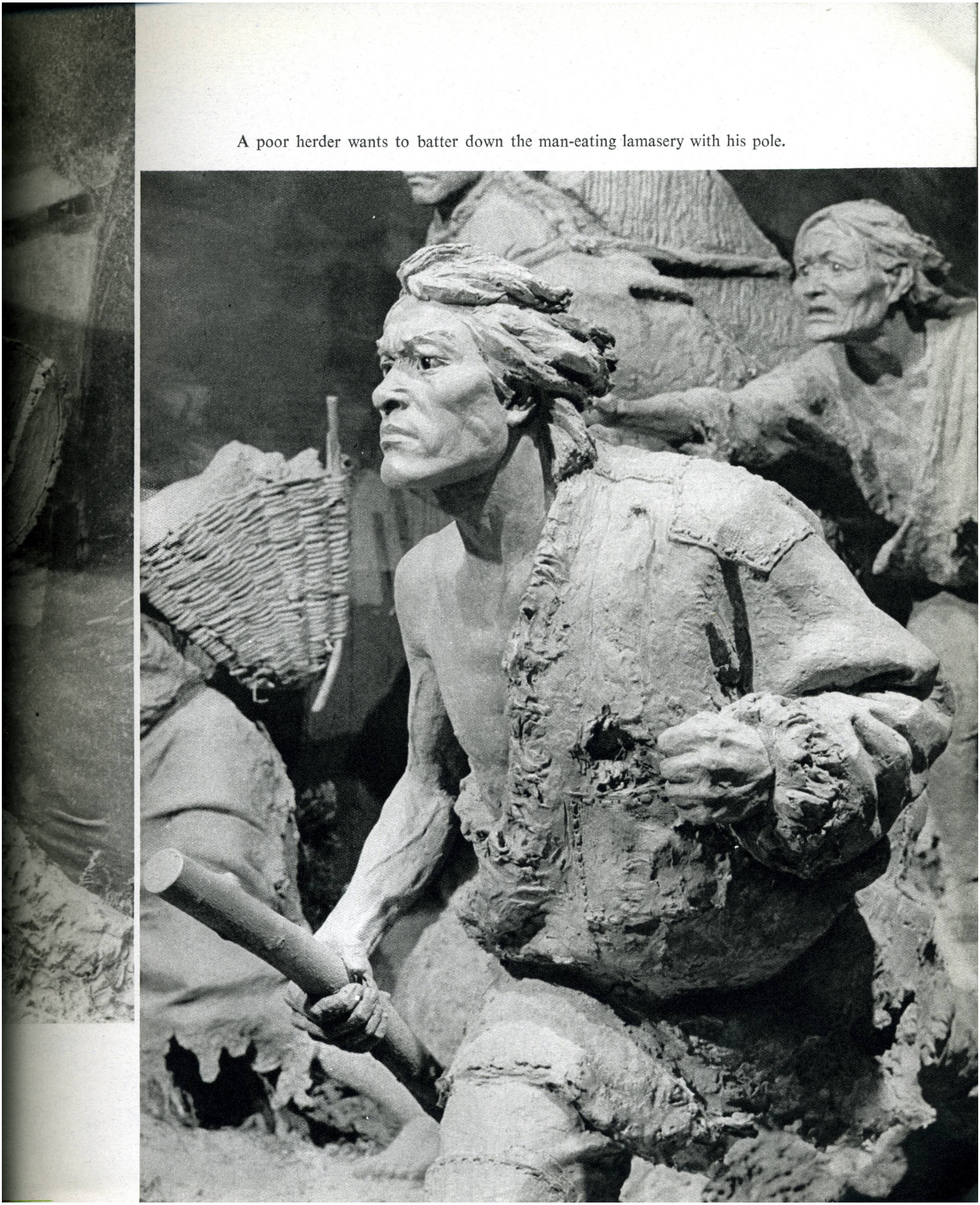
The boy is forced into the box.

A young woman serf looks on indignant.

An old woman serf cries out: "Save that child!"

Other serfs trudging up a hill with a pillar for the temple also view the crime in anger. They will one day avenge the child's death.

A poor herder wants to batter down the man-eating lamasery with his pole.

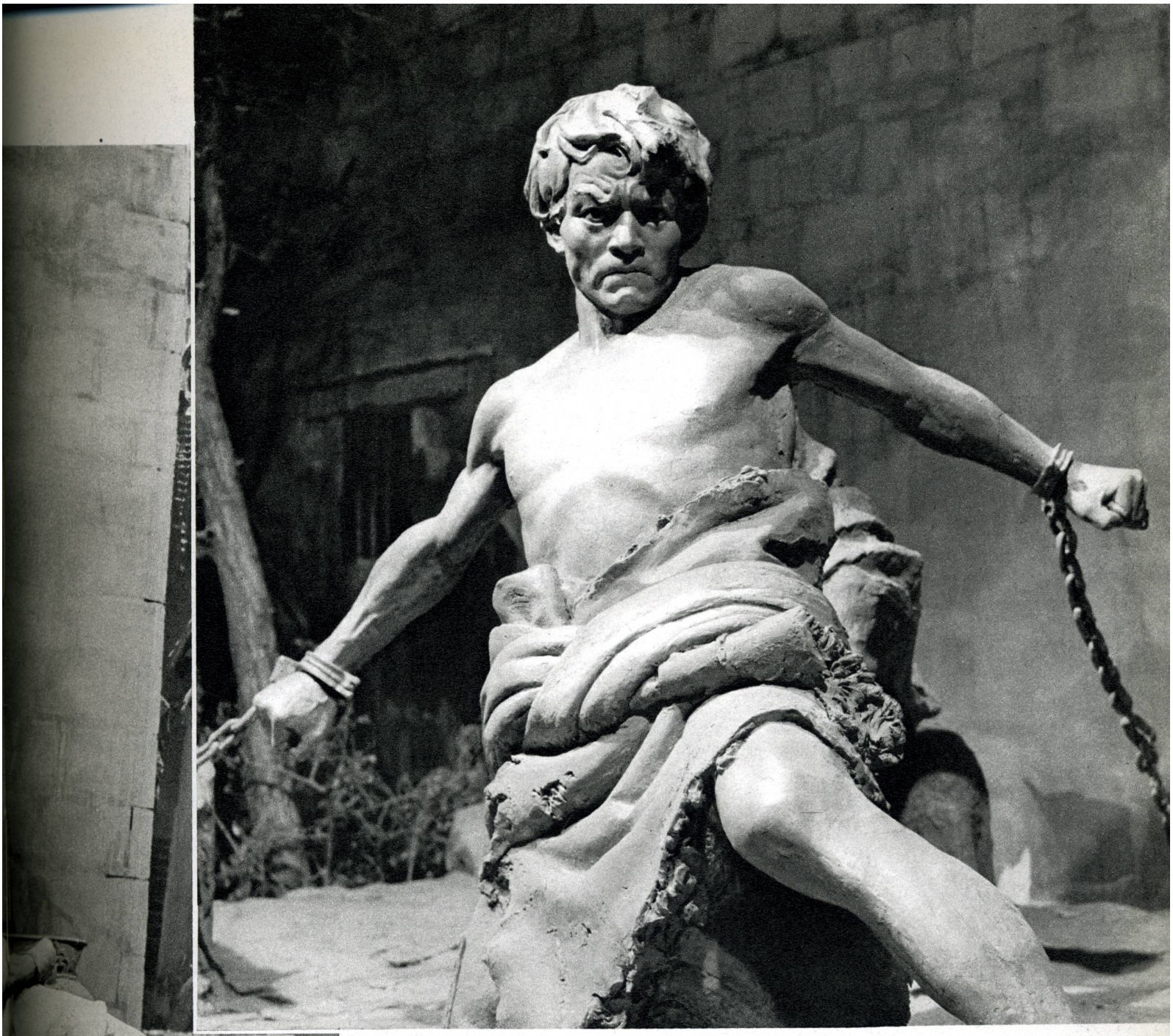


Connivance and Brutality

THE bones of serf victims lie beneath the high lamasery walls; daggers and rifles are concealed in religious robes. Those "living Buddhas" slaughtered innocent serfs like cattle, used their flesh, blood, bones and hearts as sacrificial objects. To crush the serfs' revolts and maintain their reactionary rule, the serf-owners used the lamaseries for conniving with foreign imperialists and selling out China's territories in exchange for arms and ammunition.

A "living Buddha," a reactionary local government official and a foreign imperialist direct the unloading of ammunition from a foreign country.

A serf sentenced to have both hands and feet hacked off by the "living Buddha" for defying the religious authority of the lamasery and refusing to carry out the master's traitorous intrigue.



The fearless serf throws out his chest and gazes defiance at his enemies with their bloody knife and cauldron of boiling oil to staunch the stumps of his severed limbs.

The serf unbowed.

Part III

The *Kasha* — Reactionary Local Government

THE *kasha*, the former local government of Tibet, was the means by which the feudal serf-owner class maintained its reactionary rule. It kept a large reactionary armed force, laid down its own "rules and regulations," inflicted cruel and inhuman punishments and set up its prisons to suppress the serfs. Under the sanguinary rule of the *kasha* countless serfs died, their families ruined. But none of the serf-owners' atrocities could make the serfs bow their heads, and the serf-owners' dream of preserving the feudal serf system was quite in vain.

Struggle at the Site of Execution

UNDER a gloomy, leaden sky, a bound woman serf stands heroic before the Potala Palace. Arrested for leading a serf uprising that destroyed estate-holders' manors, an act that shook the rule of the serf-owner class, she has been sentenced to death by having her heart gouged out. Fearless nonetheless, she turns to point an accusing finger at her executioners. The angry masses rush to the site in protest.

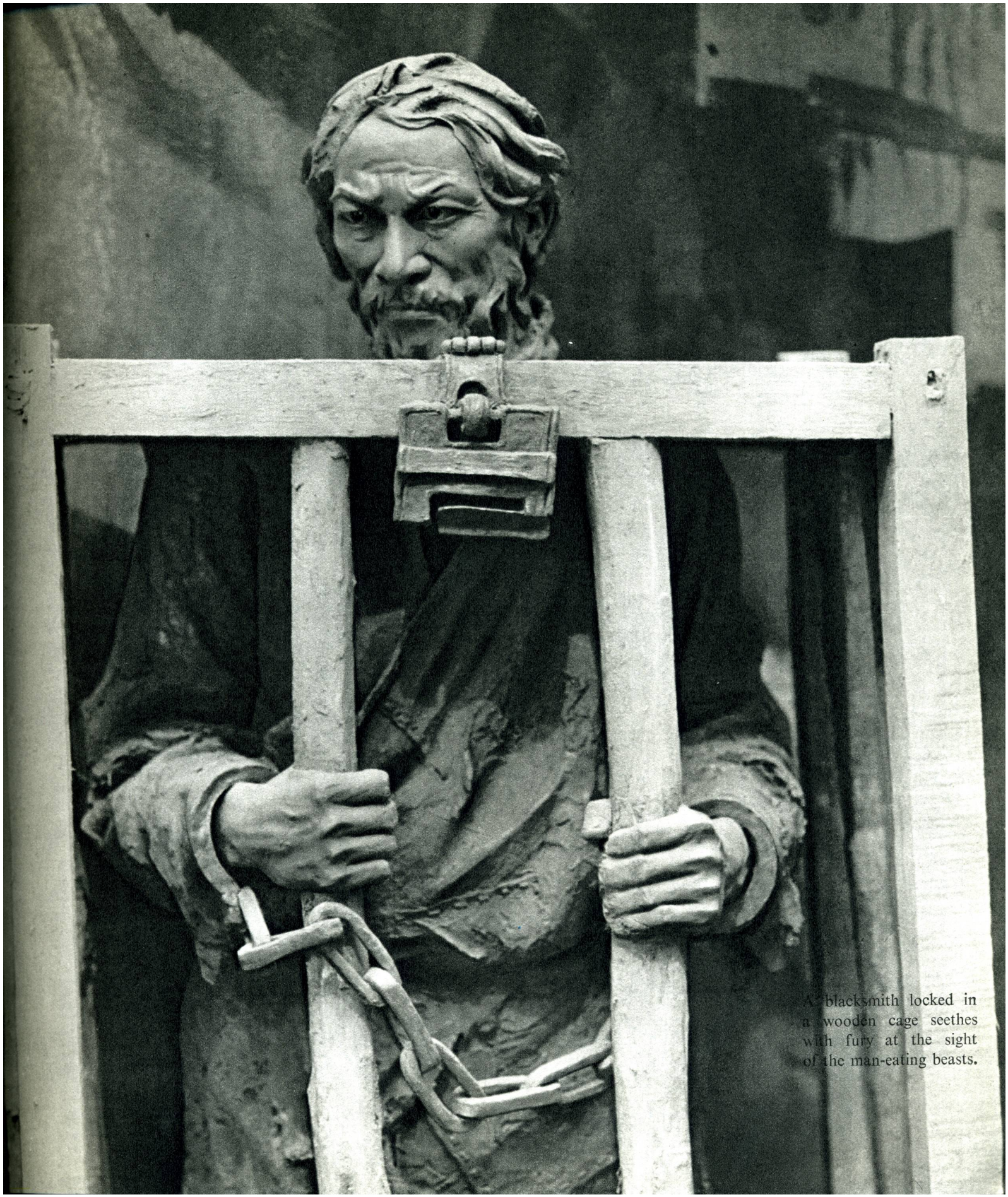
The woman serf's denunciation and the indignant roar of the serfs strike fear into the bloodsuckers in religious robes.

She points an accusing finger at her enemies.

The serfs rushing to the execution site.

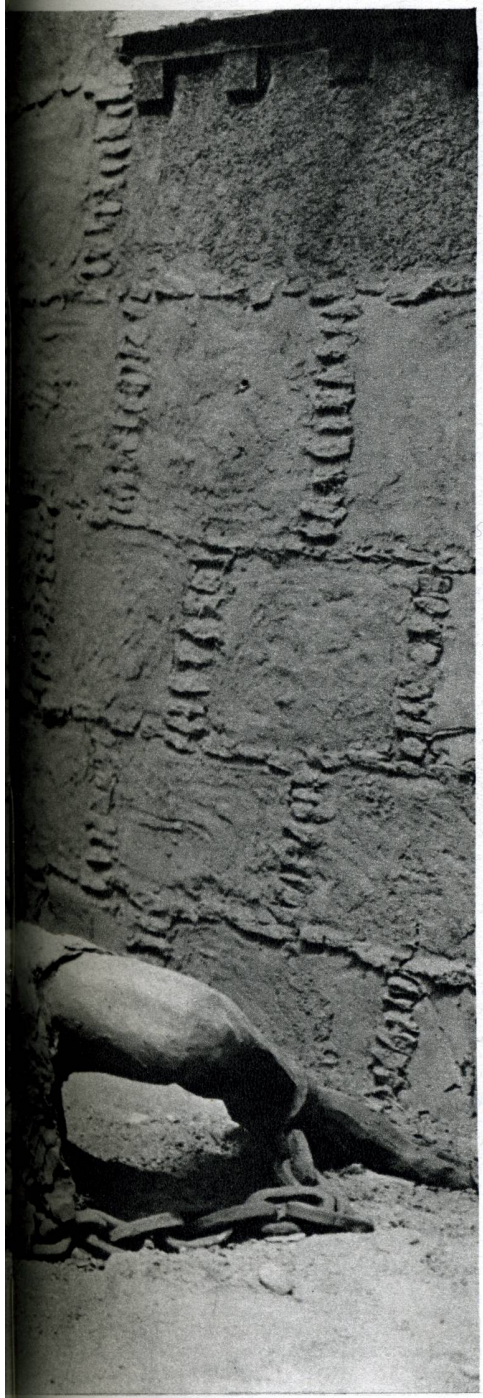
The brave woman denounces the lamasery, nobles and *kasha* for their crimes.

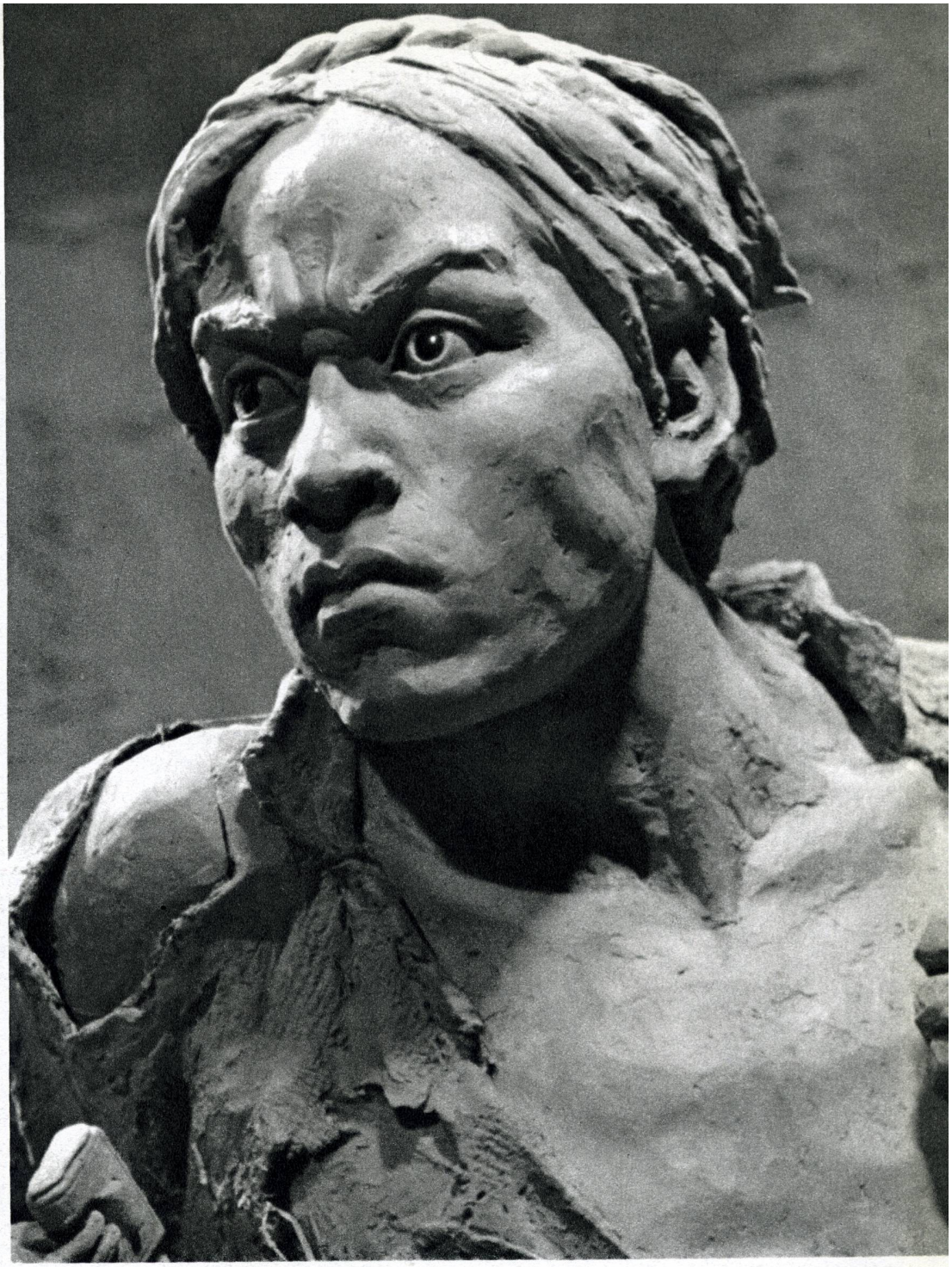
A woman serf rushes up.



A blacksmith locked in a wooden cage seethes with fury at the sight of the man-eating beasts.

Two serfs handcuffed together glare in fury at the enemy.





The younger handcuffed serf.

Exile

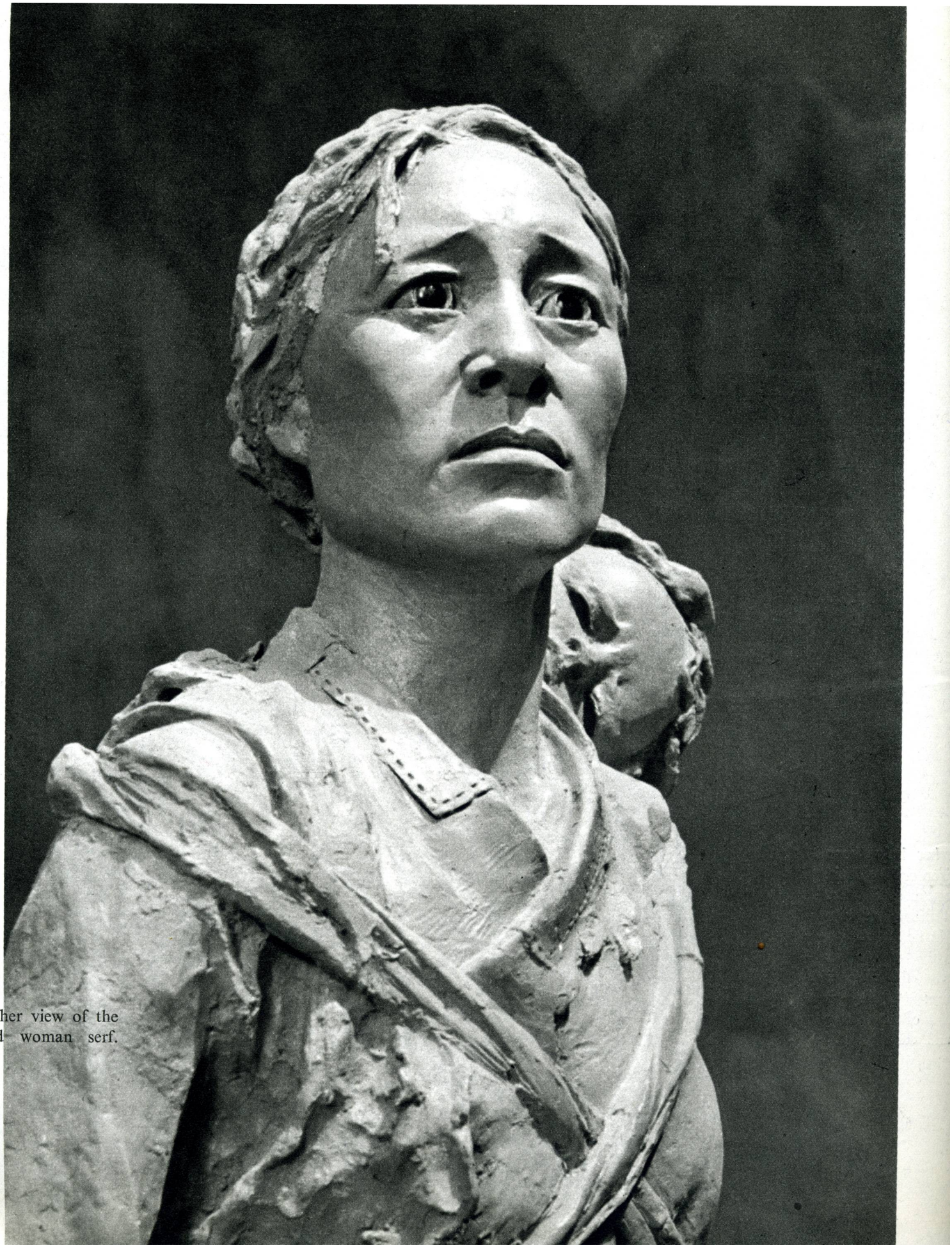
UNDER the cruel oppression of the *kasha* many serfs not killed outright were sent into exile. And see how they were sent!

This serf has been flogged to within an inch of his life, bamboo splints have been inserted under every finger-nail and he lies across an ox backwards. Thus he is sent into exile, his motherless daughter trudging along beside him.

Hatred gleams in the eyes of the child.

Other serfs being exiled.

With her baby born in prison on her back, a woman serf drags herself forward into exile in heavy chains. Through tears she stares into the distance, uttering: "Where is the end of this long and dark road?"



Another view of the exiled woman serf.

Part IV

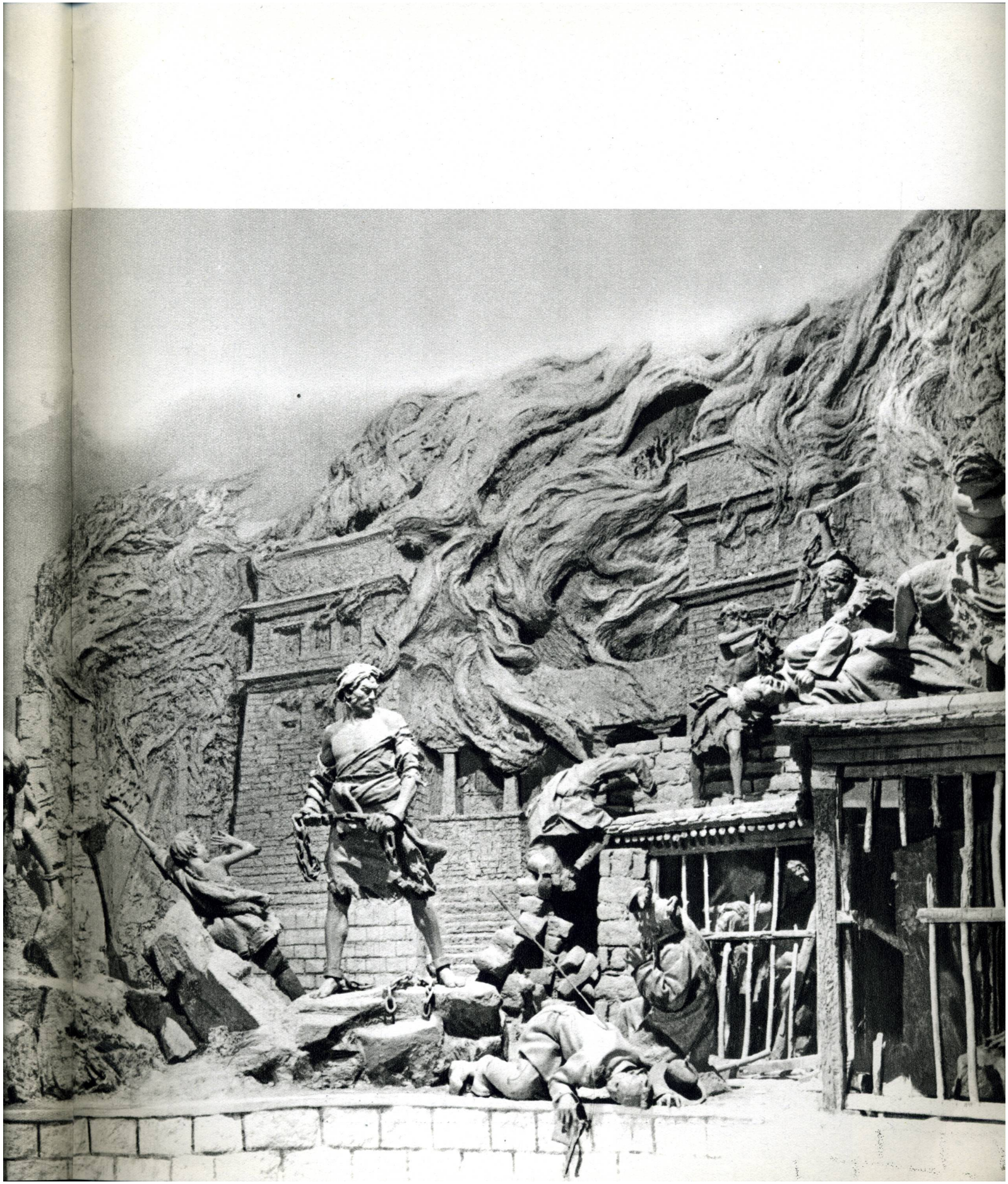
The Serfs' Struggle for Liberation

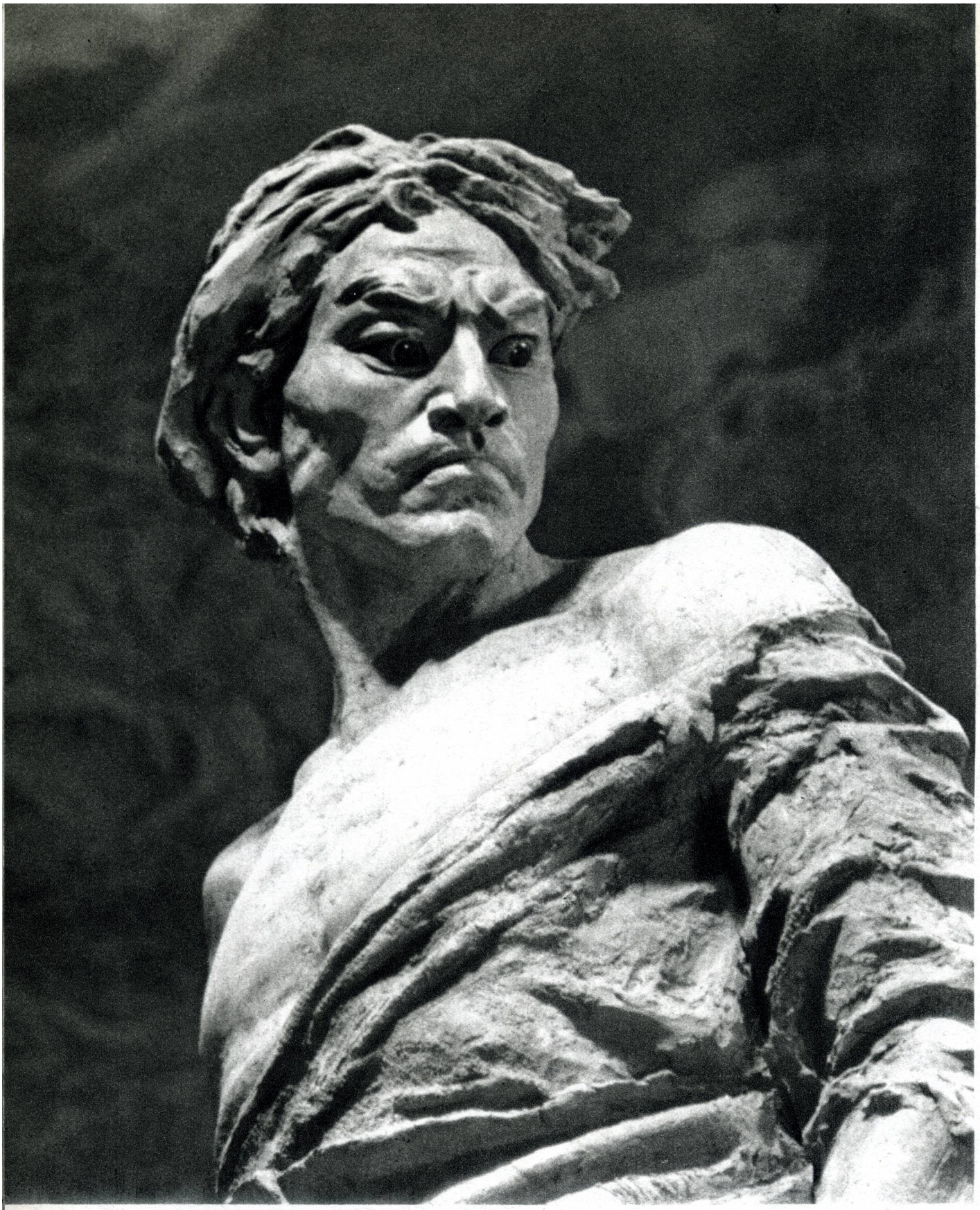
THE more cruel the oppression, the more violent the revolt. The million serfs could no longer endure the brutal oppression and persecution by the three estate-holders and they rose in one heroic struggle after another, which battered the feudal serf-owners' reactionary rule.

"We want our freedom! We want liberation!" shout the million serfs who long for their deliverer, Chairman Mao Tsetung, and the Communist Party.

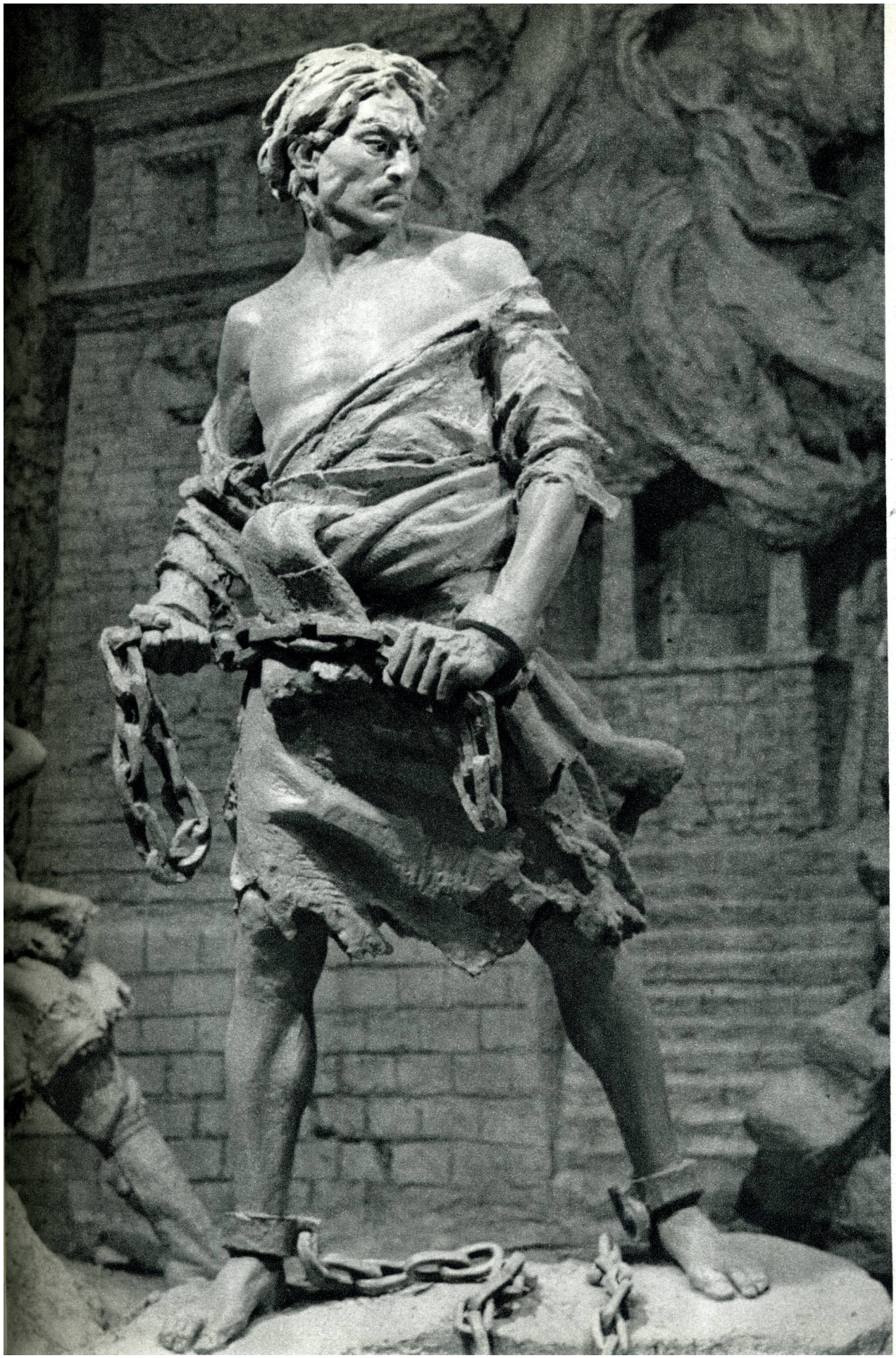
Arise, All Slaves!

LIKE angry ocean waves or an erupting volcano, the serfs' rebellions shake the entire Tibetan Plateau. Smash the thousand-year-old yoke! Burn down the man-eating prisons! The million serfs struggle heroically for their final emancipation.





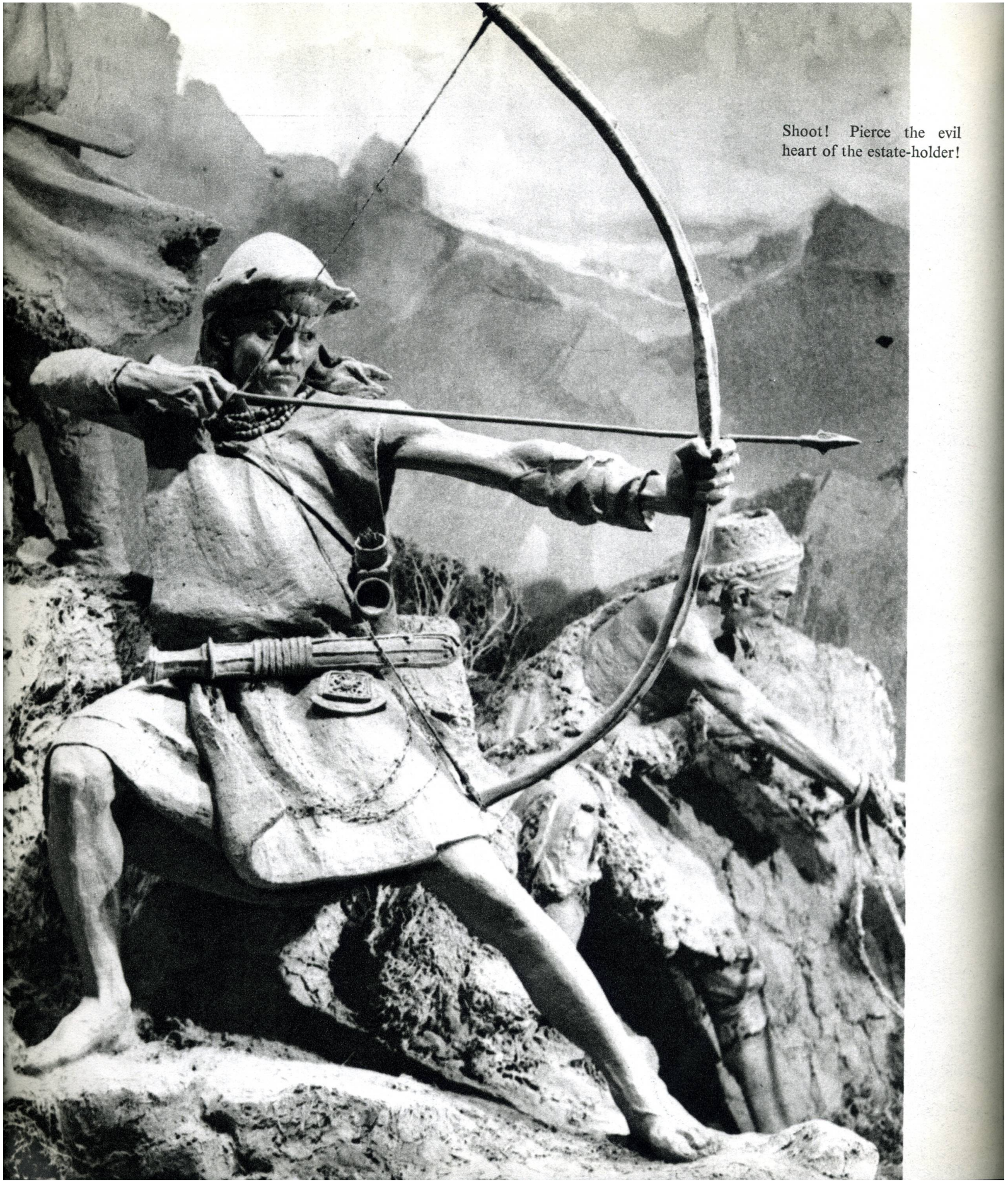
Fury flashes in his eyes and hatred pounds in his heart. This courageous serf rises to bury the criminal feudal serf system.



Standing erect and with head high, he smashes his fetters and will destroy this dark hell on earth.

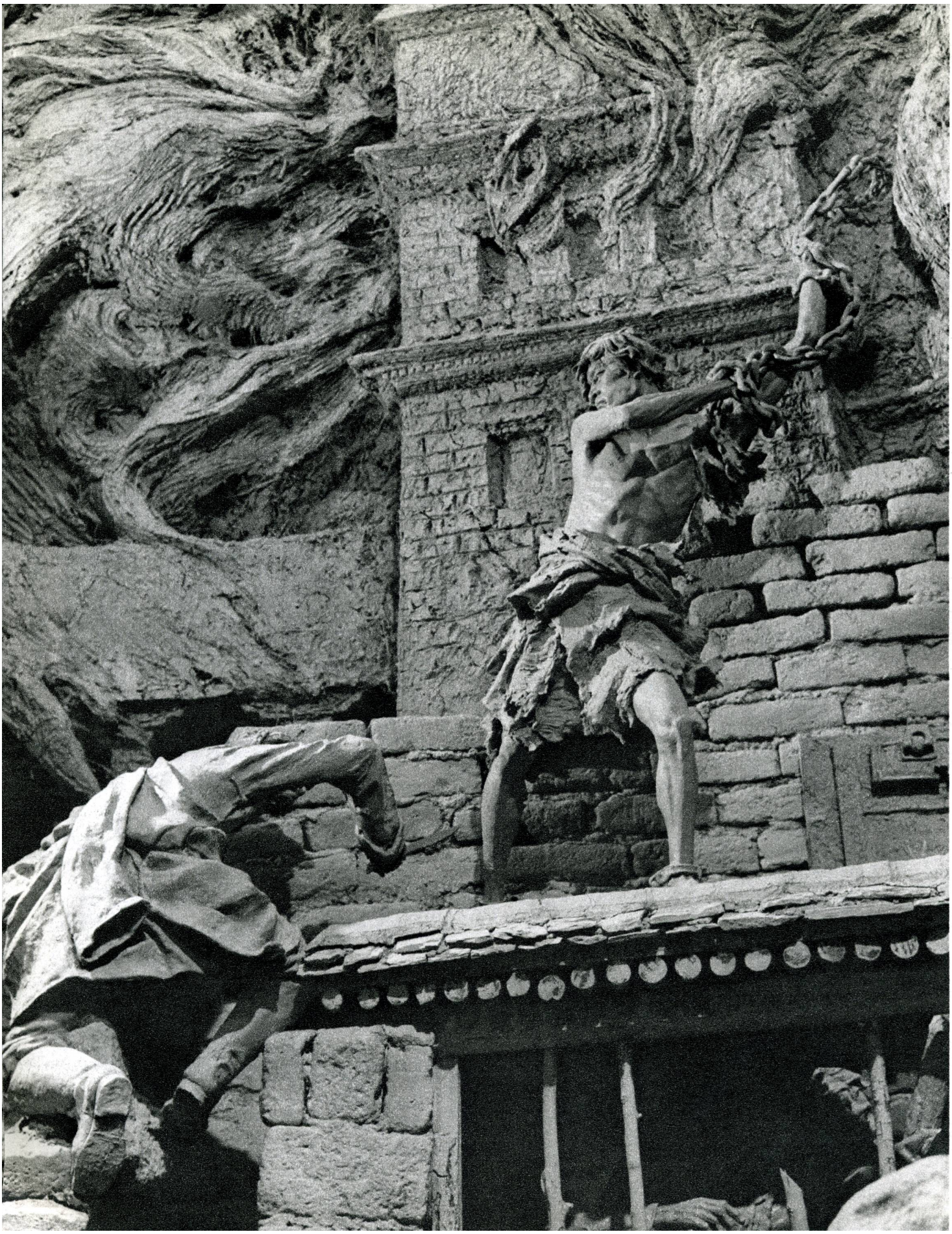
A serf smashes his yoke. The reactionary rule of the serf-owner class must be destroyed.

An angry young serf of Loba nationality draws his bow to strike at the enemy.



Shoot! Pierce the evil heart of the estate-holder!

The criminal estate-holders finally get their deserved punishment.

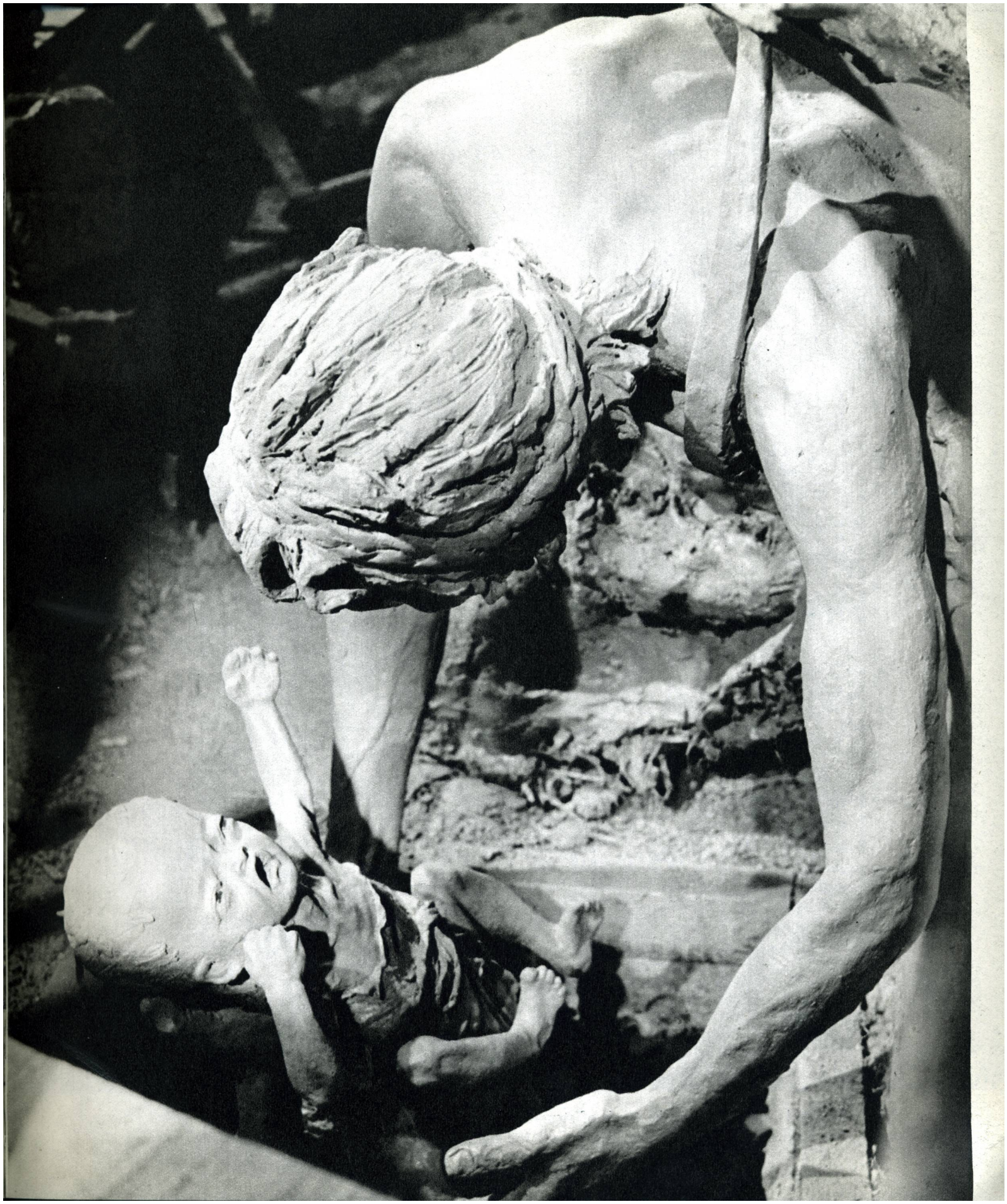


An old serf greets his dear ones from out of the serf-owners' prison.

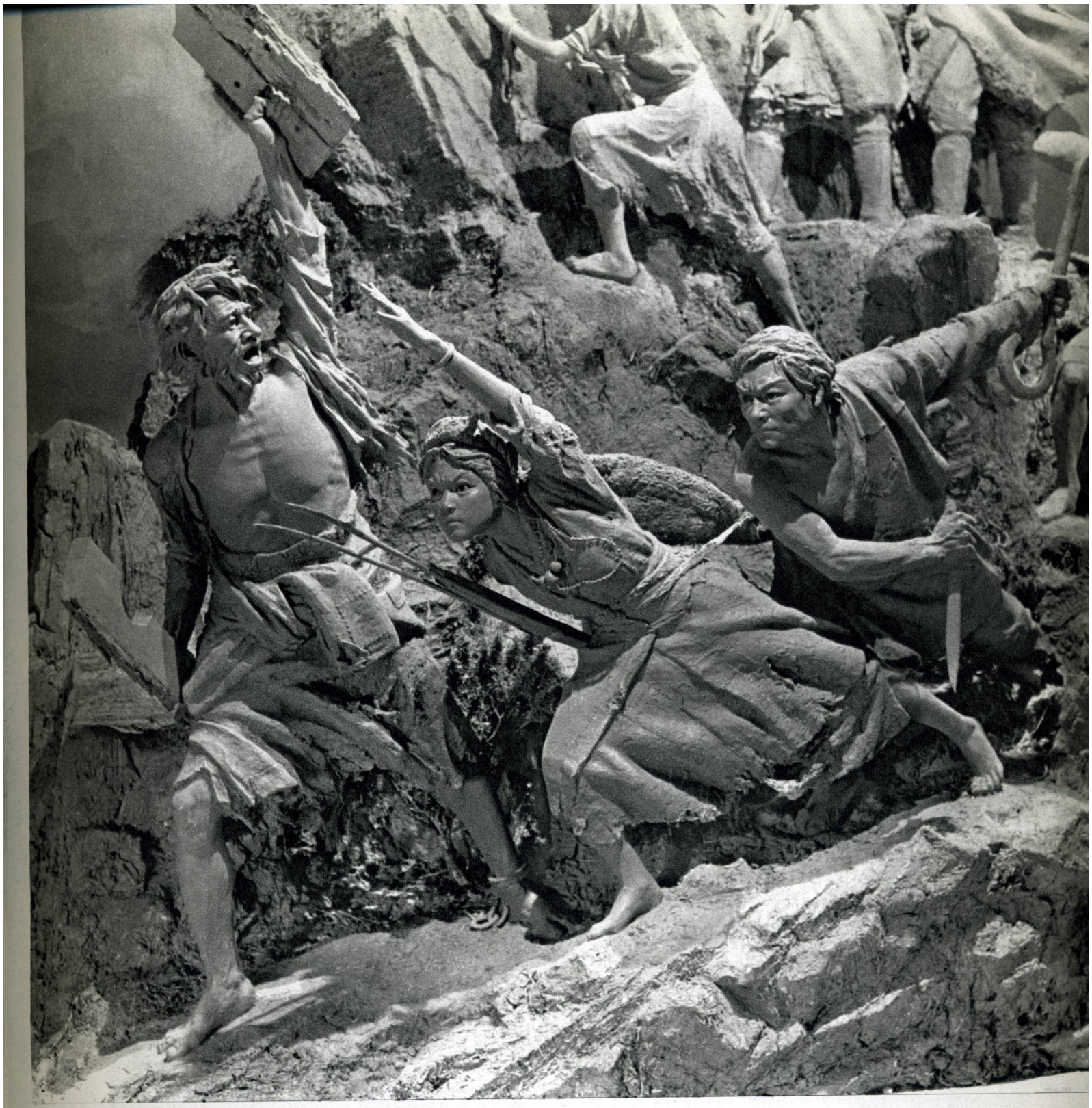
A serf raises his heavy chains to crash them down on a man-eater.

A young serf carries an old man out of his prison cell.

An infant is rescued from the scorpion-pit, which is already littered with the bleached bones of serfs.



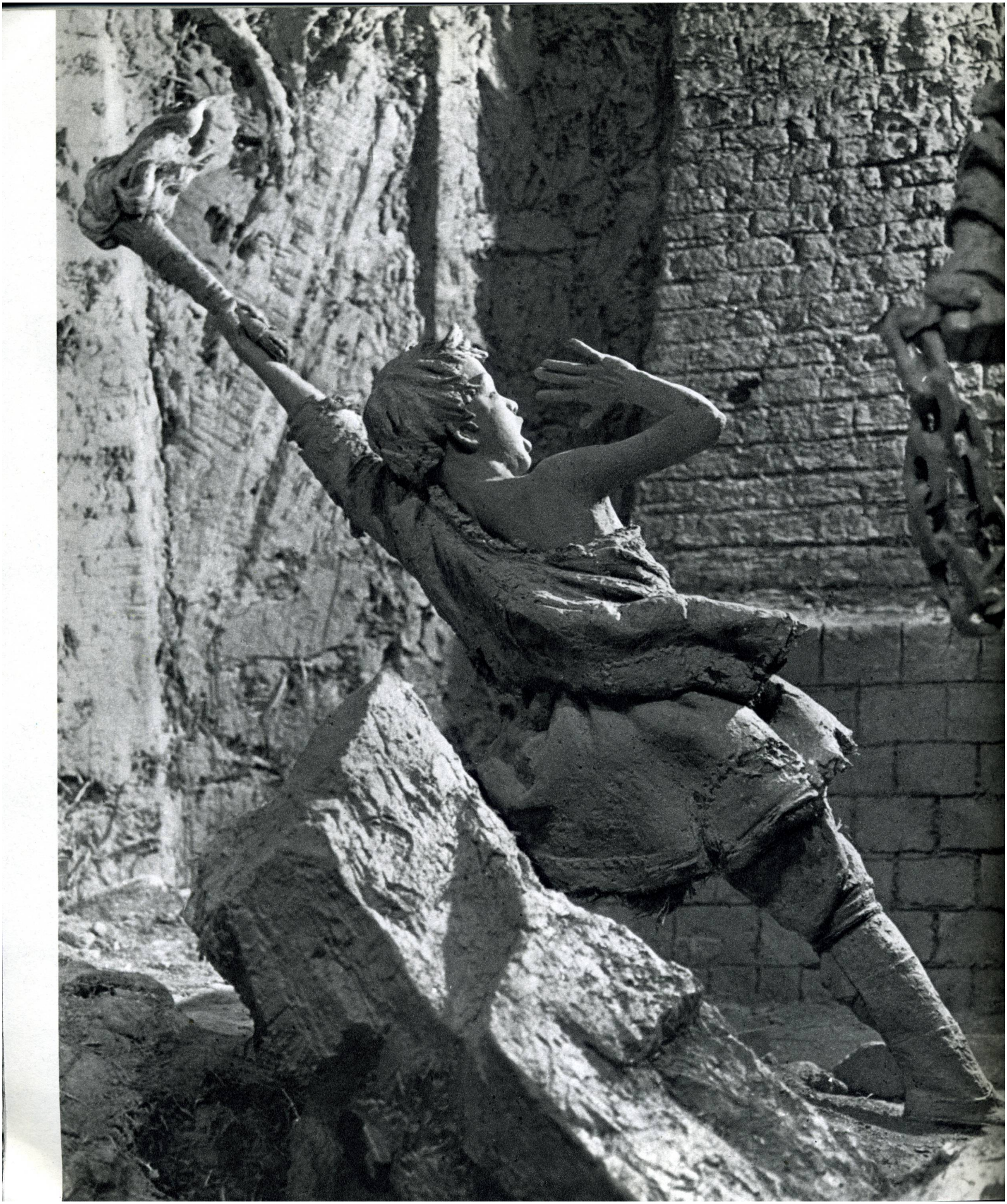
Arise, all slaves! Holding high the torch of struggle the serfs break through the centuries of darkness and emerge into the light of day.



Taking up arms, the million serfs assail the evil estate-holders' manors and the lamaseries, strike at the feudal serf system.

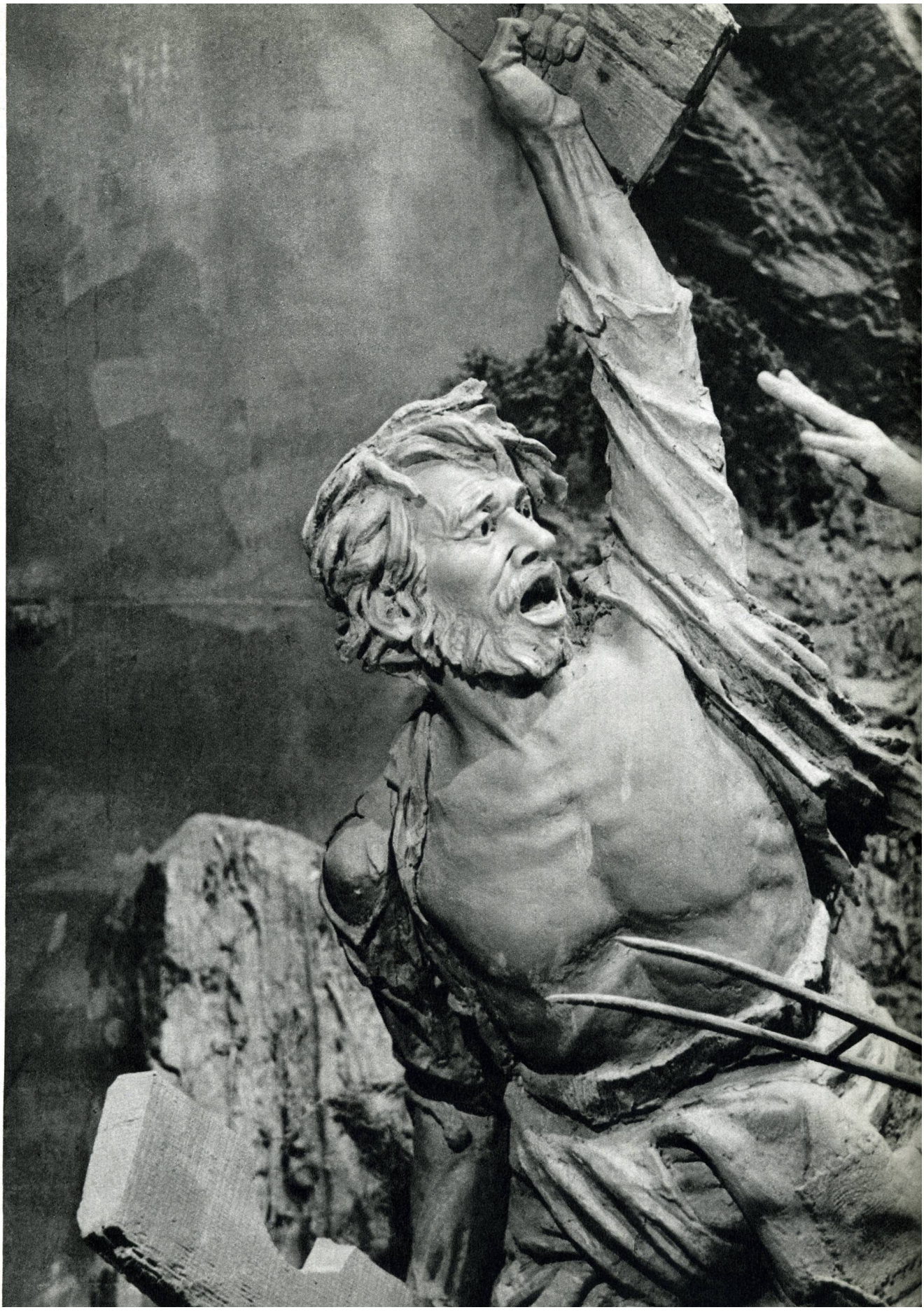
A young woman serf of Monba nationality charges forward bravely in the struggle.

An angry young serf.



A boy serf raises his torch. His flame of vengeance will destroy the prisons, destroy the dark old world!

We want our freedom! We want liberation! This girl serf traces a red star in blood to express her longing for the serfs' deliverer, Chairman Mao, and the Communist Party!



Smash your yoke!
Join the struggle
for liberation!